



AUDUBON SOCIETY IDENTIFIES IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS IN LOUISIANA

As hurricane season approaches, erosion and the loss of wetlands and barrier islands are heightened concerns for all living or working in coastal Louisiana. While swamp forest and marsh habitats are critical lines of defense from hurricanes, they are also vital to the conservation of a wide array of bird species that use the Mississippi flyway.

Bird conservation in Louisiana begins with the identification of Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Tasked with that mission is the Gulf Coast Initiative, an office within the National Audubon Society, based in Baton Rouge. The office currently houses six full-time staff members, including a resident manager at Audubon's 26,000 acre Paul J. Rainey Sanctuary, located west of the mouth of the Atchafalaya River.

The Gulf Coast Initiative and the Baton Rouge Audubon Society have striven to promote local endeavors for identifying IBAs, developing coastal forest protection measures and enhancing bird habitats in parks.

In 2006, through a combined initiative of National Audubon Society chapters in Baton Rouge and New Orleans, the first phase of the IBA program in Louisiana was begun. As Louisiana's first Director of Bird Conservation, ecologist Melanie Driscoll has worked with a committee of local scientists to identify nineteen IBAs; many of which harbor populations of birds of concern at globally significant levels. "The Important Bird Areas in Louisiana cover thousands of square miles; more area than in other regions in the country," Driscoll said.

Based on bird data collected over the past eight years, Driscoll's committee has nominated nearly 17 million acres, including virtually all of coastal Louisiana. Data for thirty bird species, including the Piping Plover (federally listed as endangered), the Snowy Plover (listed as threatened), and 6 other species (listed on Audubon watch lists), were used to determine the level of significance of each IBA identified. Most of the IBAs in Louisiana are of global or continental significance to one or more species of birds.



Egrets are just one of many bird species with a habitat in the Atchafalaya River Basin



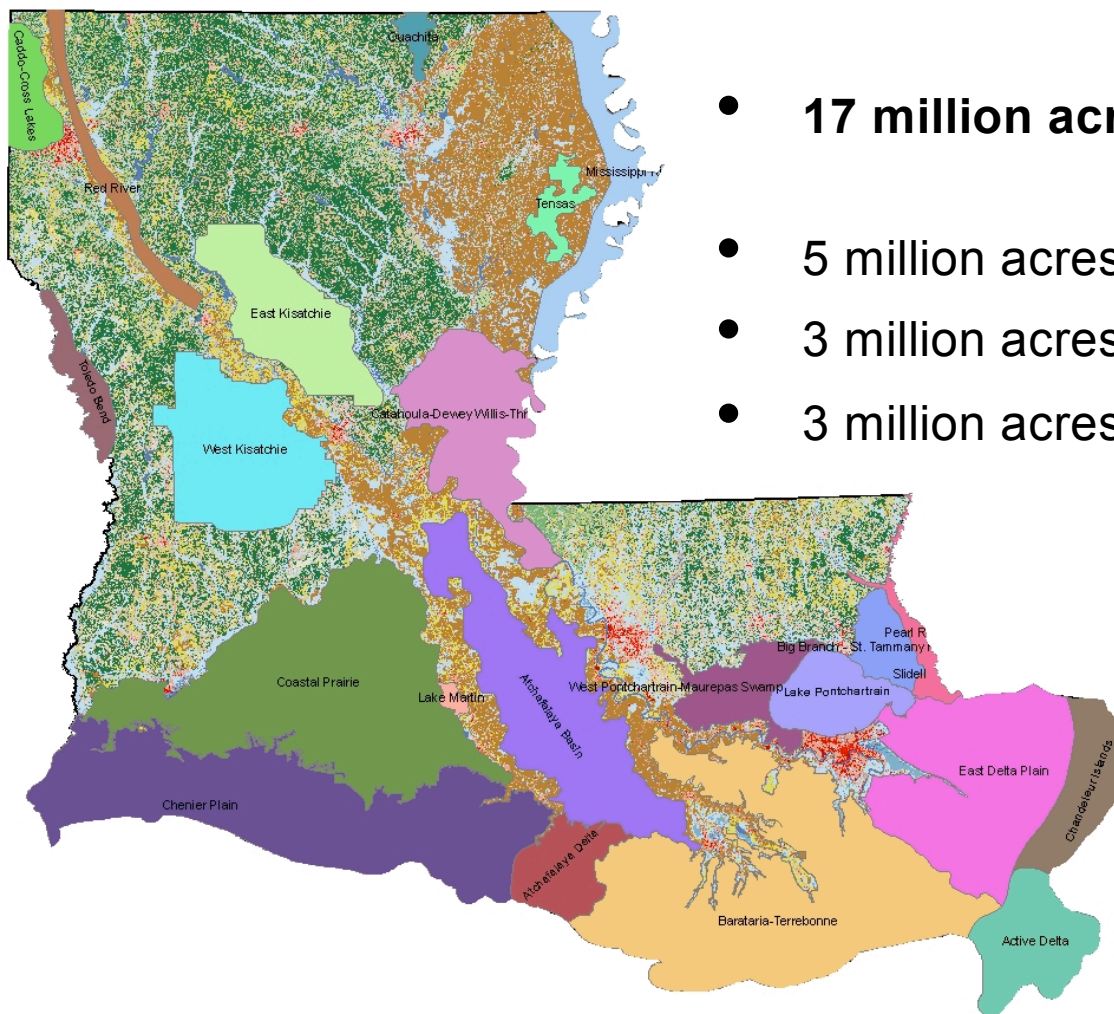
The Piping Plover is listed on the endangered species list



“We are excited to be working closely with the Baton Rouge and Orleans Audubon chapters on conserving important areas for birds, as well as with other key partners to re-engineer the Mississippi River for a sustainable future, including the Nature Conservancy, National Wildlife Federation and the Environmental Defense Fund’ said Dr. Paul Kemp, Vice-President of the National Audubon Society’s Louisiana Gulf Coast Initiative.

For more information, contact Dr. Paul Kemp (pkemp@audubon.org) or Melanie Driscoll (mdriscoll@audubon.org) at (225) 768-0820. Join the Baton Rouge Audubon Society at <http://www.braudubon.org/index.asp> or Orleans Audubon Society at <http://www.jjaudubon.net/>. The National Audubon Society, Louisiana Gulf Coast Initiative, has offices at 6160 Perkins Road, Suite 215, Baton Rouge, LA 70808 (<http://louisianacoast.audubon.org>).

Important Bird Areas in Louisiana



- **17 million acres**
- **5 million acres water**
- **3 million acres marsh**
- **3 million acres swamp**